

Learning Resilience

The International Resilience Project in [A guide to promoting resilience in children: strengthening the human spirit](#) by Edith Grotberg reports:

“resilience is a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity.”

and *“many children are not resilient and many parents and other care givers do not help children become resilient”*



I recently had the opportunity to work with my partner, Michelle, who is a vice principal in an international school in Switzerland, as she prepared and presented a workshop for parents on building resilience in their children. While I listened and observed the conversations with parents, I realized that this was important information to share with teachers. I have often heard the phrase “teaching resilience” but I recognized the real need is to create opportunities for students to learn resilience.

Grotberg suggests, *“that people do not know about resilience or how to promote it in children. Children need to become resilient to overcome the many adversities they face and will*

*face in life: they cannot do it alone. They need adults who know how to promote resilience and are, indeed, **becoming more resilient themselves.***"

Michelle shared with parents the Resilience Project's guidelines stating that children draw from three sources of resilience features, labeled: I HAVE, I AM, and I CAN. What they draw from each of the three sources may be described as follows:

I HAVE

- * People around me I trust and who love me, no matter what*
- * People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble*
- * People who show me how to do things right by the way they do things*
- * People who want me to learn to do things on my own*
- * People who help me when I am sick, in danger or need to learn*

I AM

- * A person people can like and love*
- * Glad to do nice things for others and show my concern*
- * Respectful of myself and others*
- * Willing to be responsible for what I do*
- * Sure things will be all right*

I CAN

- * Talk to others about things that frighten me or bother me*
- * Find ways to solve problems that I face*

- * Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous*
- * Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or to take action*
- * Find someone to help me when I need it*

A resilient child does not need all of these features to be resilient, but one is not enough.



As I examined these elements I thought they provided a valuable structure for teachers to use as they examine their classroom environment and instructional practices. The “**I have’s**” suggests the things we should be providing students: limits and expectations; modeling of respect and empathy, caring, and passion for learning; encouragement for learning from mistakes and autonomy. The “**I am’s**” and “**I can’s**” suggest the opportunities we need to provide so that students can develop areas of value and capabilities: opportunities to take initiative and solve problems; to assist others and request and receive assistance; to accept responsibility for choices made.

Michelle had the parents explore the connections between resilience, perseverance, and grit and shared an [NPR](#)

[interview.](#)



Duckworth identified four psychological assets of grit that can be acquired, practiced, and cultivated:

- #1 **Interest:** "you can't be gritty without being interested"
- #2 **Deliberate Practice:** this requires knowing what practice is needed and having the discipline to "do it"
- #3 **Purpose:** grit is more likely when the outcome is meaningful and beneficial to people who are not yourself, a beyond-the-self outlook, a beyond-the-self purpose.
- #4 **Hope:** the hope to keep going when hope seems lost, a growth mindset, an optimistic explanatory style for negative events.

This list also provides a great starting point for teachers to consider the activities and opportunities they want to provide for students. It reinforces for me the value of engaging students in goal setting around interest and purpose where they can identify the needed deliberate practice. As progress occurs, hope can be built. Debriefing students' experiences increases the insights and understandings they can apply to future choices.

How to build resilience is a valuable topic for PD, PLC's, and coaching explorations. Is your leadership team examining how to build teachers' resilience?